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ABSTRACT

A holistic and teleological approach to individualized FL instruction is proposed as a possible universal pedagogical theory. The following guidelines are offered. Broad goals and specific operational objectives should be defined, and performance testing devices developed. Each student's particular psychological aptitudes and physiological and cultural characteristics must be discovered, and the psychosocial uniqueness of each language should be recognized. The student can then be offered a choice of goals and tests compatible with his or her aptitudes, characteristics, and interests; on this basis, overall instructional and interactional strategies can be planned. Individual learning paths should be assessed according to the performance of communicative tasks. Finally, the instructor should remain flexible at all stages and, together with the students and the administration, involved in a continuous process of self-evaluation and renewal. As students should learn how to study on their own, it is felt that programmed materials would be most helpful. Specific references are made to "Basic French." (Author/AM)

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RATIONALIZING INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION.

Although partly repeating or paraphrasing what has already been said or written about what individualized instruction should be, I will try to use a rational approach or simply good old fashioned common sense to emphasize some aspects of individualized instruction which have been somewhat neglected.

USING A HOLISTIC AND TELEOLOGICAL APPROACH

First of all and at all times, one must keep in mind that self pacing, introduced by some teachers who had been reminded of Procrustean practices, is not synonymous with individualized instruction. If I don't want to lie in bed, it does me very little good that you give me a bed with a length appropriate to my size.

Although, recently, various negative reactions have been voiced against individualized instruction (Disick:1975), there is only one thing that is wrong with truly and completely individualized instruction. It is too difficult to achieve and, therefore, discouraging. Otherwise, it is the only possible universal pedagogical theory because it is holistic and teleological, which means that it recognizes that each individual has unique innate aptitudes which combine in a unique entity moving toward particular goals of self realization mostly under the extrinsic influence of environment and the intrinsic impulse of inner motivation (Niedzielski:1973a). Truly individualized instruction recognizes that different individuals want to reach

different goals; therefore, ideally, we should provide for each of them a different instructional system (Niedzielski: 1970b).

DETERMINING BROAD GOALS.

To begin with, we need to determine the purposes, goals and objectives of FL education. Although generally neglected, the purposes of all areas of education should be similar: to help the student become a better member of every social group he belongs to.Through foreign languages he may play a role in the largest group of all: the international scene. But, if he wants to communicate with foreign people, he must understand their values, their attitudes, their clichés, their taboos. Effective competence includes the knowledge that a form, while grammatically correct, is culturally not acceptable and not used (Rubin:1975). In fact, language is a social activity and, as such, it gets its meaning from the context in which it is used (Khubchandani: 1973).

But to live in any society, one must make a living. This point is being stressed, possibly overstressed, everywhere by students, teachers, organizations, and other official institutions, under the name of Career Education (Lippmann:1974; Rolland:1974). Possibilities for goal individualization on the basis of centers of interest for which language is a tool are extremely rich and can be tremendously rewarding. When the language teaching profession realizes and implements this concept, international cooperation will become greatly enhanced as a

German chemist, a French bacteriologist, a Polish sociologist, a Japanese or American businessman, as well as a Russian poet could lecture in their own language whenever visiting a foreign University. This would require, however, that a very important goal be finally taken seriously and incorporated into all beginning language programs: teaching how to learn a new language instead of just learning a particular language (Mueller, Niedzielski:1974:Preface).

DEFINING SPECIFIC OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Although possible operational objectives may be obvious for some sensorimotor tasks like greetings, compliment making or even reading aloud; the strong opposition voiced in many circles against their very concept indicates that an important problem still remains to be solved: how to determine useful, practical and measurable performance objectives. The solution is not always simple but a general principle may be applied. It was implicitely given by Boileau in his Art poétique:

"Ce qui se conçoit bien s'énonce clairement
Et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément."

Whenever specific operational objectives remain impossible to define; instead of rejecting the concept of objectives as not applicable to a given broad goal, one must first try to discover the various elements of that goal and see exactly how they combine to form a total which, at times, is greater than the sum of all its parts.

Any subject matter may always be divided à la Descartes, whether it is a seemingly passive skill like listening (Niedzielski:1975b), a social skill like situational conversation (Niedzielski:1971), a creative skill like composition (Niedzielski:1972) , a sensorimotor skill like phonetics (Niedzielski:1973b), an aesthetic sense like literary appreciation and criticism, or a set of skills necessary for cross cultural perception and non verbal communication (Niedzielski: 1975a).

DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE TESTING DEVICES

The rationale for developing performance testing devices ahead of time, i.e. before instruction begins, is that the students will know exactly what linguistic and cultural behavior they must reach and master and how their achievement will be measured. Although probably not always possible, teaching to the test provides constant, practical, non subjective means to evaluate the students' learning process. This is particularly essential when students acquire the knowledge outside of class through self instruction.

DISCOVERING EACH STUDENT'S PARTICULAR PSYCHOLOGICAL APTITUDES

In individualized instruction, even more than in conventional mass instruction, one must know how one's students are able to learn and how they do learn. Many attempts have been made but, with two or three possible exceptions (Bracht:1970;

Glaser:1972 and especially Murakami:1974), they have generally remained either inconclusive or impractical because they tried to find out which individual possesses a more or less general language aptitude, instead of looking for what particular gifts or aptitudes each individual is endowed with. This lacuna should be remedied; and, already, some pedagogues are collecting information on various qualities exhibited by language learners successful in their present instructional systems (Rubin:1974; Mueller & Elton:1975). The analysis of these qualities should lead to the description of corresponding aptitudes and later to the writing of particular psycholinguistic aptitude tests. Various sociopsychological tests already in existence could be utilized as a point of departure ; the dominant characteristic of instructional systems, including the teacher's personality and approach, would be analyzed and correlated with each student's particular aptitudes as well as his or her performance after a certain amount of training in the given system.

That is the approach I have chosen with the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities slightly modified and expanded to extend its validity to the high school population age and to group the particular abilities in a manner paralleling the natural order in the language acquisition process: perception, imagination or association, memory and motor skills (Niedzielski:1975c). Altogether nineteen subtests are used. Two measure two types of perception - auditory and visual; six, mostly based on association, evaluate three types of imagination-

aesthetic, semantic and grammatical; nine attempt to determine five types of immediate and retentive (medium and long term) memory-- auditory, visual, manual or sensorimotor, semantic and grammatical; finally two subtests provide information about manual and verbal sensorimotor aptitudes.

As indicated in its name, the ITPA seeks to discover and determine psycholinguistic abilities; these are only a subset of possible psychological traits which may influence an individual's learning of a foreign language. Two individuals may be endowed with similar psycholinguistic abilities and yet reach completely different levels of achievement. For instance, these students may differ in their drive towards perfection. This desire influences the mode of learning further, as it contributes to the student's self-image and his or her general personality traits, such as introversion or extraversion, causing him or her to learn better in a directive or non directive atmosphere, in a well organized audio-lingual class or in a loosely structured workshop (Politzer & Weiss:ND; Politowska:1974).

RECOGNIZING EACH STUDENT'S PHYSIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS.

It is a well observed fact that age is an important factor in language learning. On one hand, younger persons are physiologically more flexible, which gives them a distinct advantage in acquiring new sounds and in adjusting to new situations; on the other hand, they are less mature

and less endurant, which limits their cognitive hierarchies and their attention span.

Insufficient recognition has been given to cultural differences in learning styles. Depending on their socio-economic background and the values or attitudes prevalent in their culture,or subculture, students perform better in a large group situation or in individualized setting. In some societies, listening until the entire code is absorbed and then speaking is the preferred form of learning; in others, successive approximation to native speech works better; while in still others, rote learning is the most efficient strategy (Rubin:1974).

ACKNOWLEDGING AND IDENTIFYING PSYCHOSOCIAL UNIQUENESS OF LANGUAGES.

As mentioned above, language is a social activity. Whether used by a poet, a politician, a businessman, an engineer or a mother speaking to her young child, its primary function is to communicate ideas-- unilaterally, factually or symbolically, but always in a particular manner, more or less subjective and always culturally determined. Each language is at least the resultant of many geographical, historical and other sociocultural forces which have determined the private logic and the lifestyle of the community using that particular language.

The prelinguistic semantic relationships among lexical

categories may be universal, but their linguistic or structural representations depend on particular cultural logics and thus vary from one language to another, sometimes from one situation to another.

When such sociolinguistic differences are explained, it becomes easier, within each language system, to understand grammatical peculiarities and to accept cultural reactions. If these differences did not exist, language teaching or learning would be much easier and could be fully mechanized; machine translation would also be much more feasible. However, they do exist and they cannot be ignored without impunity. It is utopian and erroneous to believe that the same structural analysis and/or the same pedagogical technique will work for all languages.

OFFERING EACH STUDENT A CHOICE OF GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND TESTS.

After having assessed useful goals, objectives, tests, and individual aptitudes, we may suggest to the student a choice of several fields or careers, which he should be able to learn with greater facility. The ideal might be to show him exactly on a videotape what he will be able to do at the end of his journey and at certain stages.

If his psychological aptitudes, his physiological and cultural characteristics permit it, he should be encouraged to choose long-range educational goals, which will help him to develop a well- rounded personality. Being the most refined

linguistic expression of any community , literature is most useful here as it may serve to relate individual and cultural particularities with human universality.

PLANNING OVERALL INSTRUCTIONAL AND INTERACTIONAL STRATEGIES

Almost per necessity, there exists, in most FL learning situations, a dichotomy between the instructional phase , essentially linguistic, and the subsequent interactional phase during which the knowledge acquired during the first phase is applied in culturally meaningful situations. A different learning strategy must be devised for each phase, in such a manner that it will attract the student. However, rather than saying that "if it is attractive, it is pleasant and easy" one should probably say that "if it easy, it becomes attractive and interesting".

But how can we ensure that a task is easy? Well, there are several ways. One is through trial and error, i.e. through experimentation, by giving the student the occasion to learn and perform part of the task using various media (Niedzielski: 1970a, Sinclair:1971, Asher& al:1974); another one, favored by many communication specialists, is to bombard the student with the materials to be acquired more or less simultaneously through as many media as possible: oral. written, pictorial, manipulative (Carroll:1966,104); a third one would be to know what particular aptitudes the student possesses and use the one or more media utilizing best the student's abilities (Mueller:

1971, Rivers:1971).

As an example of instructional strategy considering the individual learner's aptitudes and learning styles, I would like to quote at random some passages from the Preface to the second Edition of Basic French (Mueller, Niedzielski:1974).

Each student is an individual with different gifts and aptitudes; therefore you must work out the learning strategy which is most efficient for you. Suggestions are made based on what is known about foreign language learning.

1.Students vary greatly in their ability to hear and remember speech. Some can quickly identify new sounds and intonations and imitate them..... Others have difficulty and need visual props." (Niedzielski, Schmitt:1975).

... Therefore :

a. Those who have a good ear and memory can learn without seeing everything in print. ...

b. Those whose ears are less sharp need to make a greater effort in developing the ability to hear and remember. They will achieve it by:

-- simultaneously reading the materials heard on the tape;
-- checking each response with the printed confirmation answer".

In a version of this book I am preparing for the teaching of French to speakers of Polish, I am adding simple pictorial semantic representations af all conversations and of some basic structures; but it is perhaps just as advisable to have each visually minded student contribute his own visual aids. This additional activity further individualizes the course and enhances the student's memory of the contents because he or she remembers the thoughts that went into the creation of the prop (Niedzielski:1974).

"2. Students vary greatly in the amount of time needed.

...

3. Students vary in their mode of learning.
a- Some students can learn without many explanations. Others, however, need to understand the language principles before they can practice the sentences. Therefore, detailed explanations are given with a test after each point. The test will determine whether you understood the rule or not. These tests are called Exercises.
b. All students need further practice for each point of grammar. Two types of drills are provided".

In short, the student can choose between pattern drills- depending on repetition -- and cognitive drills-- based on creative use of language both in the recognition, and production, of sentences and their application in conversation. Both modes may be mixed in various proportions to suit the student.

Since in the interactional phase the student must communicate with other students, like in a display session, activities performed in groups of all sizes should be encouraged. Within those groups, cooperation among the students must always be the keyword (Więckowski:1973, passim), whether it is called jigsaw (Aronson & al:1975) or strip story.

ASSESSING INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PATHS

Even going through all the preliminary steps mentioned above does not guarantee that the student will reach his final destination. Many obstacles may still discourage him. He may worry about his progress if the target seems too distant; he may become uninterested because his mativation is not reinforced by frequent enough opportunities to display what he has

already accomplished (Niedzielski:1968) or to practice what he has learned (Rubin:1974).

At least two devices can help to reinforce the student's self confidence: frequent testing and independent learning. Both are inherent in self - instruction, where the student is taught the principles of rational thinking and scientific methods, observing facts, emitting hypotheses, verifying additional facts and constructing systems -- without which, flexibility and continuous independent learning are probably impossible (Gass & all:1972,42).

In turn, two techniques prove essential to facilitate self-instruction: programing and contextual learning. Both are used in Basic French (Mueller & Niedzielski:1974) and Intermediate French (Mueller & al:1972). They develop in each student some habits essential not only for language learning but also for cross cultural perception and communication, and indispensable for solving any type of problem. These traits may be called guessing (Macnamara:1973), inference (Rubin:1974), association (Stern:1973) or generalization .

REMAINING FLEXIBLE

The same qualities of flexibility and continuous independent learning which are found desirable for the students must be practiced by the teachers, There is no shame in admitting a mistake and even the best techniques are not universal. Thus it is imperative to remain flexible at all stages and, together with the students and the administration, involved in a continuous process of self - evaluation and renewal. It will

make sure that the goals of the entire program, its accomplishments, its resources, its activities, its spirit and atmosphere remain adequate in kind and in quality, in the eyes of all the people concerned: public, legislature, administration, students and teachers.

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